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DELL LANDRETH McKEITHAN

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S SATIRE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

IN "THE ARTIST OF THE BEAUTIFUL"

by

Dell Landreth McKeithan

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Approved by

Robert O. Stephens  
Director

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Greensboro,  
North Carolina.

Thesis  
Director

Robert O. Stephens

Oral Examination  
Committee Members

Robert O. Stephens

Donald G. Darnell

James Ellis

Marian Franklin

May 25, 1965

Date of Examination

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The consensus among modern critics is that Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Artist of the Beautiful" is a type of parable that may be given various interpretations, all of which cast the artist as an admirable character opposed to forces that seek to destroy him. My thesis is that the artist is the object of Hawthorne's satire, and through him Hawthorne is retaliating against Emerson for articles in the Dial that can be read as deprecating Hawthorne.

By nature sensitive and proud, Hawthorne adopted a defensive, ironical style while still a boy. Perhaps he derived the style from the speech and writings of his times, for it was popular among the masses as well as among the intellectuals. He retained and polished the style in his mature writings and sometimes used it as an outlet for resentment against those who offended him.

The circumstances of Hawthorne's life, which were not fortunate, perhaps increased his skepticism and sensitivity. For he spent years of intense effort to win recognition as an author and, by his own admission, succeeded only in selling relatively few stories and impressing his readers as a kindly, mild-mannered man. His associations also were not of the happiest: because of his love for Sophia Peabody he was drawn into the company of Transcendentalists with whose philosophy he disagreed and by whom he was not admired as a writer. With Emerson he was

particularly incompatible. Consequently, all things considered, it seems not unlikely that Hawthorne would have taken offense at Emerson's articles, which deprecated writers who withdrew in lonely arrogance from society, refused to accept responsibility for advancing the growth of the new nation, and sought only to better themselves materially instead of contributing to the intellectual and spiritual enlightenment of the reading public. Much in both articles condemned just such traits of character and personality as mere acquaintances might have judged typical of Hawthorne.

The similarities of imagery and vocabulary in "The Artist of the Beautiful" and Emerson's Nature are too numerous to be merely coincidental. Furthermore, Warland, the supposed hero of the story, is a victim of extremism in his love of the beautiful. Excessive devotion to any idea that would separate a person from humanity was a kind of sin that Hawthorne condemned in other characters of his creation, such as Ethan Brand and Rappaccini. Also, it is only because the story is told from Warland's point of view that the other characters in "The Artist of the Beautiful" appear to be reprehensible persons. By eliminating the deceptive point of view, the reader finds that the other characters are the kind of persons whom Hawthorne treated sympathetically in other stories. Therefore, it appears probable that Hawthorne used "The Artist of the Beautiful" to ridicule Transcendental ideas and his famous neighbor Emerson, thus again indulging his resentments through satirical reprisal.

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## PREFACE

Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Artist of the Beautiful" may be logically interpreted as a satirical attack on Transcendentalism, particularly as set forth in Emerson's Nature. Furthermore, an examination of Hawthorne's manner of writing, personality, and life history prior to 1844, when the story was originally published, provides grounds for inferring that the purpose of the story was not merely to ridicule Transcendental ideas but to exorcise Hawthorne's animosity toward Emerson.

This interpretation does not agree with that of the majority of critics, who apparently accept Hawthorne's statement that the story is a "representation of the troubled life of those who strive to create the beautiful."<sup>1</sup> They agree that Hawthorne is defending the artist, Owen Warland, and therefore, by allegorical implication, is defending artists and art generally. They are not agreed, however, about other meanings that may be drawn from the story. For example, Mark Van Doren<sup>2</sup> and Newton Arvin<sup>3</sup> find

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<sup>1</sup>"The Artist of the Beautiful," Mosses from an Old Manse, Riverside Edition, II (Cambridge, Mass., 1882), p. 522.

<sup>2</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1962), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup>Hawthorne (New York, 1961), pp. 132-133.

Hawthorne simply building his case against the materialistic thinking that was pervading the thriving new nation. Roy R. Male<sup>4</sup> and Richard Harter Fogle<sup>5</sup> think the story "consists of a series of oppositions that bulk large in the writings of Coleridge and other Romanticists: the useful and the beautiful, the material and the ideal, the mechanical and the organic, understanding and imagination."<sup>6</sup> Charles Howell Foster believes the story reveals Hawthorne's literary theory: a writer's highest aim should be to create the beautiful.<sup>7</sup> Randolph Von Abele detects evidence in the story of Hawthorne's confusion about the place of the artist in the world. Von Abele assumes that Owen Warland is trying to "equate craftsmanship with reproduction, and in this way assert his emancipation from the feminine and hence from the earthy."<sup>8</sup> Donald A. Ringe thinks the story illustrates Hawthorne's conviction that those who choose to be in advance of mankind must accept self-sacrificial

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<sup>4</sup>Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, 1957), pp. 34-35.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Harter Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Okla., 1952, 1964), pp. 70-90.

<sup>6</sup>Male, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>"Hawthorne's Literary Theory," PMLA, LVII (March, 1942), 241.

<sup>8</sup>"Baby and Butterfly," Kenyon Review, XV (Spring, 1953), 288.



isolation.<sup>9</sup>

These examples of the variety of inferences that can be drawn from the story are not exhaustive nor are they meant to suggest that the critics cited exclude other inferences by their emphasis upon one. The examples show, however, that despite differing opinions about Hawthorne's underlying philosophy, the critics assume that the author is treating the artist sympathetically. Thus they seem to ignore, or deny the validity of, the widely held critical opinion that one of Hawthorne's deepest convictions was that to separate oneself spiritually and intellectually from mankind was a great moral error. Yet Owen Warland commits this sin.

This inconsistency in critical opinion draws attention to a fundamental problem in critical method: identification of the point of view. When the story is interpreted as a satire, it is plain that the entire story is told from Warland's point of view, with the author completely withdrawn. Hawthorne later used this deceptive point of view in The Blithedale Romance, presenting the story as Miles Coverdale saw it. Also, in this book Hawthorne again used the device of giving the character from whose point of view the story is told a name from which inferences about his personality may be drawn. As the name

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<sup>9</sup>"Hawthorne's Psychology of the Head and Heart," PMLA, LXV (March, 1950), 124.

Owen Warland is suggestive, so is Miles Coverdale, for it was the name of the translator of the English Bible published in 1535.

Mark Van Doren classifies eight stories of Hawthorne's second collection, Mosses from an Old Manse, as satires, but "The Artist of the Beautiful" is not among them.<sup>10</sup> Neal Frank Doubleday classifies the same eight stories as satirical allegories and thinks it probable that, since they were all originally published in 1843 or 1844, all were written during the same period.<sup>11</sup> It is my opinion that "The Artist of the Beautiful" was also a product of Hawthorne's sustained satirical mood and should be classified as the ninth satire in the collection.

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<sup>10</sup>Van Doren, pp. 128-129.

<sup>11</sup>"Hawthorne's Satirical Allegory," College English, III, No. 4, (January, 1942), 325.

## CHAPTER I

### HAWTHORNE'S DISPOSITION TO SATIRE

If there is one phase of critical analysis upon which the majority of twentieth century scholars agree in their varied approaches to Hawthorne, it is that he is to be taken seriously. They agree substantially with Randall Stewart's opinion that "Hawthorne was a serious-minded writer whose works, taken together, constitute in the highest sense a criticism of life. . . . He probed to the deepest realities of the mind and spirit. . . ." <sup>1</sup> But Edward Wagenknecht questions whether modern critical preoccupations with symbolism, multiple-level interpretations, and ambivalences suggestive of deep psychological probing do not predispose us to make Hawthorne "over into our own image." <sup>2</sup> That image is a sober one, according to many observers of the national character. They find that though Americans pride themselves upon their sense of humor, they are a serious people, dedicated to purposeful work, even to the extent of working hard at playing. Furthermore, if E. B. White sees it correctly, Americans

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<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1948), p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer (New York, 1961), p. 3.

reserve their praise for only the serious in literature.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps, then, the temper of the age explains the modern critical tendency to emphasize the somber aspects of Hawthorne's writing. The temper of Hawthorne's age was far different. It was a time when the masses relished "satire and burlesque and nonsense and parody and criticism."<sup>4</sup> These types of humor had been developed into distinctive American patterns in the talk of pioneer people. In the opinion of Constance Rourke, such a development was inevitable, for the difficulties of pioneer life and the terror inculcated by the Calvinistic faith suppressed the emotions of the pioneers beyond endurance: "Such compression with such power was bound to result in escapes and explosions. The result was a rebound; and frequently enough this occurred in New England, from the time of the revelers of Merrymount onward. A constant opposition existed between the dark emotions and an earthy humor."<sup>5</sup>

The "dark emotions" are certainly evident in Hawthorne's writing. The opposing humor is there, also, though not of the "earthy type." It was more in the nature of the "low-keyed satire, the faint masquerade" that

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<sup>3</sup>E. B. White and Katherine S. White, ed., A Subtreasury of American Humor (New York, 1941), p. xviii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xx1.

<sup>5</sup>American Humor (New York, 1931), p. 11.

Constance Rourke thinks "might have been rooted national habit, so snugly did these fit into the popular fancy. Here was the other side of cockalorum and bravado, swinging to satire and understatement, using a delicately edged weapon."<sup>6</sup>

Popular fancy was also pleased by the burlesque produced in theaters of the first half of the 1800's. Among the most successful producers was William Mitchell, who established his Olympic theater in New York in the late '30's and kept it well filled with almost wholly masculine audiences. "Mitchell caught and punctured every current wild obsession, romantic or merely comic, every theme which the current American fancy had taken up with its familiar fervor. He revealed all the characteristic native capacity for plunging headlong into new enthusiasms. He was in fact burlesquing the American public as well as its preoccupations."<sup>7</sup>

Even if Hawthorne had little or no opportunity to witness such performances, he was an omnivorous reader and can be assumed to have kept himself informed of the latest themes and fashions of the theater as well as those in the magazines and books of his time. It is plain that through the speech and writing of his day he was conditioned to the use of such ambiguous types of writing as irony, sarcasm,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 121.



and burlesque and made use of them for his own purposes from boyhood on.

When he was fifteen and attending Mr. Archer's school in Salem, he wrote his sister Louisa: "I now go to a 5 dollar school, I, that have been to a 10 dollar one. 'O lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen!'"<sup>8</sup> At sixteen he was amusing himself by composing a weekly newspaper, in one issue of which he included the essay, "On Industry." In it there is evidence that he had already begun to belittle his role as author, a habit continued in his mature writing. He says: "It has somewhere been remarked that an Author does not write the worse for knowing little or nothing of his subject. We hope the truth of this saying will be manifest in the present article. With the benefits of Industry we are not personally acquainted."<sup>9</sup>

This tongue-in-cheek tone continues to be basic to his letter writing in college days, when he writes Louisa: "I have no clothes in which I can make a decent appearance . . . and shall therefore be compelled to stay at home from meeting all the rest of the term, and perhaps lie in bed the whole time. In this case my fines would amount to an enormous sum." As he continues with persuasive

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<sup>8</sup>Stewart, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 9.



arguments to get Louisa's cooperation in pleading with his mother to allow him to come home, he says if he stays away a week more he will spend all his money, for though he is "extremely prudent," he always feels "uneasy" when he has "any cash" in his pocket.<sup>10</sup>

His mature writing is simply a more polished and subtle version of the boyhood style. The personality of the mature man was evidently in keeping with his ambiguous writing manner, if the conflicting impressions recorded by his articulate contemporaries can be accepted as typical of judgments about him. To his wife he was "our sunshine"; to Rebecca Manning he was a person who "carried twilight with him" wherever he went. Rebecca Harding Davis saw in his face a "mysterious power . . . never matched elsewhere in picture, statue, or human being"; S. G. Goodrich saw his mouth as "sarcastic," his expression "stoney," and "his whole aspect cold, moody, distrustful." There is one legend that he was once stopped by an old woman and asked whether he was "a man or an angel"; but Henry James, Sr., saw him as neither handsome nor engaging but as one who had "the look of a rogue who suddenly finds himself in a company of detectives." Frank Stearns thought his features "grandly classic"; James T. Fields admired his "princely bearing, grand eyes, and melodious voice." To Emerson he

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<sup>10</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, Vol. I, (Boston, 1885), pp. 113-114.

seemed "regal"; to Trollope he was the "handsomest of all the yankees." But Fredricka Bremmer thought his smile had a "bitter expression" and the lower part of his face lacked "decision of character."<sup>11</sup>

The criticism by Fredricka Bremmer somehow became known to Hawthorne. Wagenknecht says that years later, after meeting her again, Hawthorne "good naturedly" recollected that she had been disappointed with his conversation and had admired his eyes and brow; but had been most critical of his chin and mouth. "God bless her heart!" Hawthorne writes, "and every inch of her little body, not forgetting her red nose, preposterously big as it is in proportion to the rest of her! She is a most amiable little woman, worthy to be the maiden aunt of the whole human race."<sup>12</sup>

This is hardly good-natured. Rather, it reveals Hawthorne's sensitiveness to criticism and his tendency to retaliate. He was not above using the same weapon of sarcasm against his sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody and insulting her with the same implication of sexlessness used for Miss Bremmer. In 1855, in response to unwelcome advice, he wrote Elizabeth from Liverpool: "I sometimes feel as if I ought . . . to endeavor to enlighten you as to the relation

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<sup>11</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer (New York, 1961), pp. 9, 10, 14.

<sup>12</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 10.

between husband and wife . . . .But the conjugal relation is one which God never meant you to share, and which therefore He apparently did not give you the instinct to understand; so there my labor would be lost."<sup>13</sup>

It is well that Elizabeth recognized that the sensitive are malicious. In the days before she knew Hawthorne, she had read his statement of this truth in one of his stories and had wondered how he had come by such knowledge.<sup>14</sup> His knowledge, however, did not relieve him of the trait of maliciousness, for when dismissed from his Custom House position by the shabby tactics of politicians, he wrote Longfellow that he was determined to "select a victim and let fall one little drop of venom on his heart, that shall make him writhe before the grin of the multitude for a considerable time to come."<sup>15</sup> It is generally supposed that he carried out this threat by unflatteringly portraying Charles W. Upham in the character of Judge Pyncheon in The House of Seven Gables.

Hawthorne's sensitiveness to criticism and his resentment of being unjustly treated are rarely obvious in his professional writing. But perhaps Hawthorne's contemporary Anthony Trollope detected results of it in the

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<sup>13</sup>Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1962), pp. 106-107.

<sup>14</sup>Julian Hawthorne, p. 178.

<sup>15</sup>Stewart, p. 89.

strange type of cynicism he found pervading all of Hawthorne's writing. Interpreting The Scarlet Letter as a story of jealousy with emphasis on the hatred born of injured love, Trollope says of Hester Prynne's predicament: "The author deals with her in a spirit of assumed hardness, almost as though he assented to the judgment and the manner in which it was carried out. In this, however, there is a streak of that satire with which Hawthorne always speaks of the peculiar institutions of his own country . . . .Indeed, there is never a page written by Hawthorne not tinged by satire."<sup>16</sup>

After outlining the plot to the conclusion, Trollope says:

But through all this intensity of suffering, through this blackness of narrative, there is a ever running vein of drollery. As Hawthorne himself says, 'a lively sense of the humorous again stole in among the solemn phantoms of her thought.' He is always laughing at something with his weird mocking spirit. The very children when they see Hester in the streets are supposed to speak of her in this wise: 'Behold, verily, there is the woman of the scarlet letter. Come, therefore, and let us fling mud at her.' Of some religious book he says 'It must have been a work of vast ability in the somniferous school of literature. . . .'. Through it all there is a touch of burlesque,--not as to the suffering of the sufferers, but as to the great question whether it signifies much in what way we suffer, whether by crushing sorrows or little stings. Who would not sooner be Prometheus than yesterday's tipsy man with this morning's sick-headache? In this way Hawthorne

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<sup>16</sup>"The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review (September, 1879), 210-212.

seems to ridicule the very woes which he expends himself in depicting.<sup>17</sup>

Trollope also observes that though Hawthorne believes in the superiority of the United States, "he is always throwing out some satire as to the assumed virtues of his own immediate countrymen. It comes from him in little touches as to every incident he handles. In truth he cannot write without satire. . . ."18 Even the scene in The House of Seven Gables where Judge Pyncheon is "dree'ing his doom and dying" seems to Trollope to be pervaded by a "ghastly spirit of drollery." He thinks it puts the "reader into full communion with Hawthorne if he had not read a page before, and did not intend to read a page after."<sup>19</sup>

Mosses from an Old Manse may be liked by many readers, so Trollope thinks, but they must be the kind who are willing to have an author weave a spell about them and lead them to ideas by strange indirectness. He finds no logic in Mosses but only the "promiscuous disorder of Hawthorne's thinking." Out of this disorder Hawthorne brings whimsical sketches, one of which is "Drowne's Wooden Image," another vehicle for Hawthorne's drollery.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Trollope, p. 212.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>20</sup>Trollope, pp. 217-218.



But for Herman Melville, Mosses held a special magic, so much so that he wrote an ecstatic review of it for The Literary World.<sup>21</sup> Comparing Hawthorne with Shakespeare, Melville pleads for the nation's recognition of Hawthorne, not as Shakespeare's equal but as an American genius who speaks for his country in a unique manner.<sup>22</sup> Melville gives us a glimpse of how Hawthorne's contemporaries interpreted the American genius and makes clear his own estimate of Hawthorne's work when he writes:

But it is the least part of genius that attracts admiration. Where Hawthorne is known, he seems to be deemed a pleasant writer, with a pleasant style--a sequestered, harmless man, from whom any deep and weighty thing would hardly be anticipated: a man who means no meanings. But there is no man, in whom humor and love, like mountain peaks, soar to such rapt heights, as to receive the irradiations of the upper skies; there is no man in whom humor and love are developed in that high form called genius--no such man can exist without also possessing, as the indispensable complement of these, a great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a plummet. Or, love and humor are the only eyes, through which such an intellect views this World. The great beauty in such a mind is but the product of its strength.<sup>23</sup>

So contradictory does Melville's rhapsodical praise of Hawthorne appear in comparison with Trollope's criticism

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<sup>21</sup>Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Portable Melville, ed., Jay Leyda (New York, 1952), pp. 400-421.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 410-411.

<sup>23</sup>Melville, pp. 404-405.



that it seems as if the two now famous authors were writing of two different people. But it is a matter of focus--what they sought to find in an author. Since such personal bias influences the critical appraisal of readers in every age, it is natural that the varieties of critical approach to Hawthorne have multiplied through the years. However, the critics who have emphasized the prevalence of irony in Hawthorne's writing are relatively few. One of them was William Dean Howells, who observed the irony and beneath it found the man, whom he analyzes in this fashion:

He was a very good man, a man as pure in life as in thought, but he was primitively bad as well as primitively good, and he gave way at times to his resentments with something like aboriginal singleness of heart; at other times he retained his grudges with rather a relentless rancor, though he might not nourish them by retaliation. He mellowed with the years, as men commonly do, but always he was a man of primitive feeling, which he sometimes indulged and sometimes he did not indulge.<sup>24</sup>

Arlin Turner also believes that Hawthorne's usual approach is satirical, but in a manner so "mild and tolerantly genial that his satire all but obscures itself." Turner finds skepticism habitual with Hawthorne and comments that "satire was a suitable vehicle to reflect that attitude." To Turner, Hawthorne's way of seeing things was ironic, and irony was his natural expression from the earliest of his boyhood letters and the

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<sup>24</sup>William Dean Howells, "The Personality of Hawthorne," North American Review, Vol. 177, July-December p. 874.

items he wrote for The Spectator. He had an eye for incongruities and a relish for the unexpected."<sup>25</sup> And Turner discovers Hawthorne using the same tone in articles for the American Magazine. As an editor, Hawthorne continued to write with "restrained, ironic humor."<sup>26</sup>

Other critics see Hawthorne's irony as not so much a part of his intellectual constitution as an artistic tool in the hands of a master craftsman. For example, E. Earle Stibitz finds that "The Minister's Black Veil" is unified by Hawthorne's use of irony to make the minister the only real sinner in the story, though his actions are directed toward correcting the sins of his congregation.<sup>27</sup> James F. Ragan sees The Blithedale Romance handled in similar fashion. It is the "ironically artificial" in Blithedale that provides the satire. The idyllic community is artificial, the attempts of the reformers to be practical are absurd, and the self-righteous convictions of the reformers that they have rid themselves of pride is "splendid irony," because they are proud that they are not proud.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1961), p. 100.

<sup>26</sup>Arlin Turner, Hawthorne as Editor, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>"Ironic Unity in Hawthorne's 'The Minister's Black Veil,'" A L XXXIV (May, 1962), pp. 182-190.

<sup>28</sup>"The Irony in Hawthorne's Blithedale," N E Q, Vol. XXXV, No. 2 (June, 1962), pp. 239-246.

Robert Stanton takes a like view of Hawthorne's use of irony. He thinks Hawthorne dramatizes his stories with irony and uses it to carry a portion of the theme. By contrasting ideas, Hawthorne enabled the reader to recognize a moral, as in The Blithedale Romance. In this, the moral is revealed through the irony that each person is punished by what he rejects. For instance, Zenobia's death is caused by her own spiritual weakness, that spirituality which she symbolically rejects in the person of Pricilla.<sup>29</sup>

Robert Durr, though believing that for Hawthorne irony "was a way of seeing things," thinks that if he had not used the literary device, "much of his work would not have transcended the age." Durr notes that "the ironical writer is never the sentimental writer"; and through the use of irony Hawthorne could maintain an attitude of calm detachment.<sup>30</sup>

Julian Hawthorne would have found this opinion true of the man as well as the writer. For Julian says of his father: "He was distinguished by a cool and discriminating judgment, with a perception of the ludicrous which, especially in his earlier years, manifested itself in a

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<sup>29</sup>"Dramatic Irony in Hawthorne's Romances," MLN, Vol. 71, 1956, p. 424.

<sup>30</sup>"Hawthorne's Ironical Mode," NEQ, XXX (December, 1957), p. 495.

disposition to satire."<sup>31</sup> Also, Julian recalls that in his boyhood he was trained by his father "to detect the sentimental or mawkish taint in literature or life."<sup>32</sup>

One conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing complexity of critical opinion is that a reader is justified in being suspicious of the seemingly serious intent of most of Hawthorne's writing, because artfully hidden beneath the seriousness may be ridicule and laughter. Also, it seems possible that, as Edward Wagenknecht suggested, we may be too prone to interpret Hawthorne's writing from our own viewpoint, sometimes not sufficiently taking into account the fact that behind the artistry was the man, a product of his age, his particular environment, and his emotional as well as his intellectual responses to both.

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<sup>31</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel . . . Wife, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Circle (New York, 1903), p. 128.

## CHAPTER II

### FRUSTRATIONS AND INSULTS: THE PROVOCATIONS TO IRONY

When Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody and moved into the Old Manse in Concord, he was thirty-eight. Behind him were the none too happy days of his boyhood in Salem. Here he had become aware of the insignificance of his family in a town where once his ancestors had been prosperous and influential leaders. Here, too, he had spent years of futile rebellion against his uncle Robert Manning, who long managed the boy's training and education while being quite plain-spoken about his lack of respect for his nephew's abilities and character.<sup>1</sup>

Past, also, were his college years at Bowdoin, pleasant in many respects but darkened by his ever-present financial embarrassment. Hawthorne was poor, but his friends were the sons of well-to-do New Englanders. His financial situation was not bettered by the dozen years of painful writing apprenticeship in Salem. Nor did his brief editorship of the American Magazine bring him more than journalistic experience and insights into some of the unscrupulous methods of American businessmen. For it was

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne; The American Years, (New York, 1948), p. 97.



with difficulty that he obtained less than half of the small sum the owners of the publication had promised him for his work. He was further disillusioned by the results of his production of the two-volume Peter Parley's Universal History. It paid him little but it made a fortune for the publishers.

His years as measurer in the Boston Custom House had given him his first steady, if moderate, income. Apparently he was able to save from it enough to invest a thousand dollars in Brook Farm, where he went in 1841. He hoped to find in the community a solution to his problems--his needs for financial security for himself and Sophia, for congenial employment, and for time to write. He found the farm labor enervating to both body and imagination, and the guiding philosophy of the community's leaders absurdly unrealistic. Therefore, he could not visualize any satisfactory future at the farm, and with somewhat rash disregard of consequences decided to delay no longer in marrying Sophia and devoting his time exclusively to writing.

So it was that he began his married life--still poor, little recognized for his literary work, and burdened by memories of disappointments. His experiences could have done little to bolster his self-confidence, and according to his friend Horatio Bridge, Hawthorne had always lacked that quality. For in 1836 Bridge wrote Hawthorne a letter of encouragement and said: "The bane of your life has been



self-distrust."<sup>2</sup> If this was true, it is not surprising if Hawthorne used his natural bent toward irony for the release of frustrations. Perhaps F. O. Matthiessen's assumption that Hawthorne at times exorcised "a dangerous part of his experience by treating it with irony"<sup>3</sup> was right.

At any rate, the basis for his censure of politicians, business men, and reformers is obvious. He had a high regard for the concept of democracy and no doubt looked with indignation upon the purse-lining tactics of certain politicians. His experiences with the American free enterprise system had not increased his respect for some of its practitioners. And his association with reformers in the Brook Farm experiment had disenchanted him with idealistic efforts to make radical changes in man's nature and social institutions.

He was further disillusioned by the critical appraisal accorded his literary work. He had decided while in college to adopt writing as his profession. As a letter to his mother indicates,<sup>4</sup> he aimed not for popularity but for greatness--a superiority that would make his work comparable to that of the best English writers. Possibly

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<sup>2</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, Vol. I (Boston, 1885), p. 147.

<sup>3</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel . . . Wife, pp. 106-108.

it is for this reason that he adopted the atmosphere of a matured and settled civilization in his writing instead of a young and expanding one. Such an inference would be logical on the basis of T. W. Higginson's observation that Hawthorne and Poe were the only American writers of the time who were not hopeful, humorous, and sunny. Higginson finds that the mood of Hawthorne's work closely resembles the tone affected by many outstanding English writers of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

There is also the possibility that Hawthorne entertained an ambition to be one of the originators of a distinctly American literature. He may have shared the national resentment of the supercilious criticism aimed at American culture by English intellectuals.<sup>6</sup> He may also have been influenced by the writings of the so-called Young Americans. These New Yorkers, led by such men as Lewis Gaylord Clark and Evert Duyckinck, tried to direct the growth of a uniquely nationalistic literature, which would capture the glory and spirit of a land that could boast of uncommon marvels like the Great Plains, the Rockies, and Niagara Falls.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Hawthorne's intensive study of New England history was an effort to

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<sup>5</sup>"The Sunny Side of the Transcendental Period," Atlantic, 93 (January, 1904), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1931), pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup>Perry Miller, The Raven and The Whale, (New York, 1956), p. 31.

find material for creating just such a literature.

Whatever his intentions, it is plain that his writing ambitions directed his activities and thinking much of the time. His notebooks show that he observed both scenes and people minutely, analyzing them for possible use in his writing. He subjected his imagination to what must have been severe discipline, for he admitted in a letter to Sophia that there was a time when he thought he could "imagine all passions, all feelings, all states of heart and mind."<sup>8</sup> And his son Julian gives evidence that he succeeded perhaps too well in his aim of seeing the world through the eyes of others. Julian says his father, "both by nature and by training was of a disposition to throw himself imaginatively in the shoes . . . of whatever person happened to be his companion. For the time being, he would seem to take their point of view and to speak their language. . . . But the consequence may sometimes have been that people were misled as to his absolute attitude. Seeing his congenial aspect towards their little round of habits and beliefs, they would leap to the conclusion that he was no more and no less than one of themselves. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to thus intensively training his powers

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<sup>8</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, ed. Newton Arvin (New York, 1929), p. 66.

<sup>9</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel . . . Wife, p. 89.

of observation and understanding, Hawthorne criticized his own writing severely. Julian says that it took years of "lonely and unrecognized labor" to deliver his father from the persuasion that "his own commendation was the only thing worth his striving for."<sup>10</sup> The anguish of his perfectionism is, with his characteristically ironical diffidence, briefly recalled in one of his earliest published stories, "Alice Doane's Appeal." In explaining the origin of part of the tale, he wrote: "It was one of a series written years ago, when my pen, now sluggish and perhaps feeble, because I have not much to hope or fear, was driven by stronger external motives, and a more passionate impulse within, than I am fated to feel again. Three or four of these tales had appeared in the "Token" after a long time and various adventures, but had encumbered me with no troublesome notoriety, even in my birthplace. One great heap had met a brighter destiny: they had fed the flames: thoughts meant to delight the world and endure for ages had perished in a moment, and stirred not a single heart but mine."<sup>11</sup>

In the same story he says that his primary objective in picturing to his feminine companions the horrifying spectacle of the Salem witches' martyrdom was to reach the "seldom trodden places of their hearts" and "the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>11</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Short Stories, ed. Newton Arvin (New York, 1959), p. 413.

wellspring of their tears." He confesses that his success in doing so was a sweet victory.<sup>12</sup> And in the light of his other works, this fictional admission appears a valid indication of his constant literary intent; to stir his readers' emotions.

That he was aware of his failure to do so is evident from his opinion that his readers regarded him as a "not very forcible man."<sup>13</sup> His low opinion of the literary judgment of Americans is ironically implied in the story "The Antique Ring." The story concerns a literary dilettante whose worth has been recognized by the "editors of fashionable periodicals" and such shapers of literary tastes as Hillard, Griswold, Ticknor, and the Harpers.<sup>14</sup> The popular author writes a dolefully moralistic tale about the perfidy of human beings from Merlin's time onward, a fantasy written at the request of his fiancée. Her friends appraise the story with these criticisms: "Very pretty!--Beautiful!--How original!--How sweetly written!--What nature!--What imagination!--What power!--What pathos!--What exquisite humor!"<sup>15</sup>

These comments are suggestive of Mrs. Peabody's

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>13</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Twice-Told Tales, Riverside edition, Vol. I, (New York, 1882), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Hawthorne's Short Stories, ed. Arvin, pp. 399-400.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 410.



judgment that Hawthorne's stories had a high moral tone and "exquisite humor." Mrs. Peabody also saw "The Widows" as a "sweet tale,"<sup>16</sup> and she was probably not the only one who had offered Hawthorne this type of sentimental and depthless approval. Hawthorne intimates as much in the preface to the second edition of Twice-Told Tales. He says he believes that his few readers have a "kindly feeling" toward him, and regard him "as a mild, shy, gentle, melancholic, exceedingly sensitive, and not very forcible man." Then, with his characteristic tongue-in-cheek tone, he says: "He is by no means certain that some of his subsequent productions have not been influenced and modified by a natural desire to fill up so amiable an outline, and to act in consonance with the character assigned him; nor, even now, could he forfeit it without a few tears of tender sensibility."<sup>17</sup>

Though here he is being ironic, Hawthorne was indeed a man of "tender sensibility." Horatio Bridge says his "most marked characteristics were independence of thought and action; absolute truthfulness; loyalty to friends; abhorrence of debt; great physical as well as moral courage; and a high and delicate sense of honor.

"He shrank habitually from the exhibition of his own secret opinions, and was careful to avoid infringement upon

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<sup>16</sup>Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel . . . Wife, p. 267.

<sup>17</sup>Twice-Told Tales, p. 18.



the rights of others, while thoroughly conscious of his own."<sup>18</sup>

These characteristics along with the record of his experiences during the first thirty-eight years of his life go far to explain the man who could not whole-heartedly enter into a friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Sophia had an almost reverential respect for the famous Concord sage<sup>19</sup> and doubtless hoped for a close relationship between him and her husband. Perhaps it was wishful thinking, therefore, that caused her to write her mother that the friendship was growing, despite the fact that Emerson did most of the talking. Emerson himself, by his own admission, was baffled by Hawthorne's reticence.<sup>20</sup> And Hawthorne, however courteously he listened while the two visited in each other's homes or rambled the countryside together, privately characterized Emerson as "that everlasting rejector of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what."<sup>21</sup> He pictured him as "Mr. Emerson, the mystic, stretching his hand out of cloudland in vain search for something real. . . . Mr. Emerson is a great searcher for facts, but they seem to

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<sup>18</sup>Horatio Bridge, Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1893), p. 57.

<sup>19</sup>Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1945), p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1962), p. 123.

<sup>21</sup>Hawthorne, Heart of . . . Journals, p. 108.

melt away and become unsubstantial in his grasp."<sup>22</sup>

Publicly, in the introductory sketch to Mosses, Hawthorne acknowledges Emerson to be "a poet of deep beauty and austere tenderness," about whom shines a "pure intellectual gleam."<sup>23</sup> But as he continues his comments about Emerson, the reader begins to suspect that this is not an encomium. For Hawthorne says that one of the few unpleasant aspects of his otherwise congenial surroundings is the presence of men of warped minds, drawn to Concord to communicate with the "great original thinker." They create a situation in which Hawthorne finds it difficult "to view the world precisely as it exists." But he finds it impossible to live near Emerson "without inhaling more or less the mountain atmosphere of his lofty thought, which, in the brains of some people, wrought a singular giddiness,--new truth being as heady as new wine."<sup>24</sup>

His irony is obvious: Emerson is the unrealistic thinker, an inhabitant of "cloudland." His followers, the Transcendentalists, are drunk on ideas.

The Unitarians were of a similar breed, so Hawthorne thought. He attacked both groups in "The Celestial Railroad," satirizing the concept that man is innately good

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<sup>22</sup>J. Hawthorne, Nathaniel . . . Wife, p. 291.

<sup>23</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mosses from an Old Manse. Riverside Edition, Vol. II, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup>Hawthorne, Mosses, p. 42.

and capable of charting his own moral course. As a result of such philosophy persons exchange "Conscience" for possessions and the fulfillment of desires that bring them nothing but emptiness or disaster: a wealthy young man gets only diseases and repentance for his rights; a pretty and pure young girl barter her heart for a "worthless" one; and thousands sell "their happiness for a whim."<sup>25</sup> And the story ends with the implication that the devil himself is leading men to destruction with assurances that the way to heaven is easy and undemanding.

A convert to such beliefs is described by Hawthorne in "The Christmas Banquet," a morbid fantasy about the world's most miserable people. Among them is one who formerly was an enthusiastic clergyman steadied by firm convictions in Calvinist theology. He had yielded "to the speculative tendency of the age . . . and wandered into a cloud region, where everything was misty and deceptive, ever mocking him with a semblance of reality, but still dissolving when he flung himself upon it for support and rest." Unable to recapture his former faith and seeing nothing ahead but "vapors piled on vapors," he was, so Hawthorne comments, unquestionably a miserable man.<sup>26</sup>

In "The New Adam and Eve" Hawthorne finds it fortunate that Eve prevents Adam from reading the books in

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 341-342.

a library: he would have been contaminated by "all the narrow truth, so partial that it becomes more deceptive than falsehood--all the wrong principles and worse practice, the pernicious examples and mistaken rules of life--all the specious theories which turn earth into cloudland and men into shadows. . . ." <sup>27</sup> Here the word "cloudland" again provides the clue that he is berating Transcendentalism.

In "Earth's Holocaust" he is more specific in his attack. He notes that a volume of Ellery Channing's poems, cast into the bonfire consuming the "wornout trumpery" of the world, burned with a bright flame (indicative of the presence of truth). But "there were certain portions that hissed and spluttered in a very disagreeable fashion." <sup>28</sup>

Clearly, Hawthorne had few reservations about ridiculing his Transcendental friends. Twentieth century critic Edward Mather finds Hawthorne's harshness rather shocking, since the persons Hawthorne attacked were "the very men who, though not professing to admire him as a writer, were so interested in him that they importuned him with their attentions." <sup>29</sup> Mather is referring to Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Ellery Channing, and Thoreau, all of whom

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 299-300.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>29</sup>Edward Mather, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man (New York, 1940), p. 161.

Hawthorne had known since his days at the Boston Custom House. He had met them, along with Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, and other Transcendentalists, at the Peabody home, where he often visited during his courtship of Sophia. Elizabeth Peabody was responsible for drawing the group to the home, for she was an enthusiastic disciple of the philosophy, a former student of Emerson, and the secretary of the Reverend Channing.

But Hawthorne was not unique in ridiculing Transcendentalists. Orestes Brownson, editor of the Boston Quarterly Review, was a member of the Transcendental Club, but he treated his friends with frank criticism. He thought the Dial a "truly remarkable work" but weakened by "puerile conceits and childish expressions." He felt the authors had caught only "partial glimpses" of a better way of life and had been carried away by their enthusiasms. They lacked "robustness, manliness, and practical aims" and were "too vague, evanescent, aerial."<sup>30</sup>

This kind of criticism was certainly more directly severe than Hawthorne's satire. Yet both were kinder than the caricatures that ridiculed Transcendental ideas. James Freeman Clarke collected a portfolio of such cartoons, so numerous were they. One of them pictured a man whose head was a vast eye, a mockery of Emerson's view of himself as a

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<sup>30</sup>George Willis Cooke, "Criticisms and Caricatures of the Dial," Dial, Rowfant edition, Vol. I, p. 172.



"transparent eyeball." Another showed a man whose body was a melon, thus ridiculing Emerson's words: "I expand and live in the warm day, like corn and melons."<sup>31</sup>

The fact that criticism of Transcendentalism was not uncommon in the publications of the time seems to make Hawthorne merely another member of the opposition. From the satire in the stories previously cited there is little to indicate that Hawthorne was doing more than disagreeing with his Transcendental acquaintances. But his attack on Emerson in the introduction of Mosses is so direct and caustic that it leads one to suspect Hawthorne of intentionally trying to deprecate the man instead of merely disapproving of his ideas.

That there was never a close relationship between Hawthorne and Emerson has already been pointed out. As Roy M. Male puts it, Hawthorne and Emerson were so different in their approaches to life and art that there was "almost total lack of communication" between them.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the evidence of Hawthorne's biographers hints at no open feud between the two men. Apparently Hawthorne treated his neighbor with consistent courtesy, although he did not seek Emerson's company. It was Emerson who made most of the friendly overtures.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 174-175.

<sup>32</sup>Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, 1957), p. 36.

But in the Dial of January, 1843, there appeared an article titled, "The Transcendentalist." Emerson had delivered it as a lecture in the Masonic Temple of Boston in January, 1842. In it Emerson criticizes the kind of idealist that had come to be known as a Transcendentalist (as Hawthorne had, because of his associations with the chief exponents of the philosophy) but who were far from Emerson's idea of a true disciple. He said:

It is a sign of our times, conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living, from which no solid fruit has yet appeared to justify their separation. They hold themselves aloof: They feel the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them, and they prefer to ramble in the country and perish of ennui, to the degradation of such charities and such ambitions as the city can propose to them. They are striking work, and crying out for somewhat worthy to do! What they do is done only because they are overpowered by the humanities that speak on all sides; and they consent to such labor as is open to them, though to their lofty dream the writing of Iliads or Hamlets, or the building of cities or empires seems drudgery.

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They are lonely; the spirit of their writing and conversation is lonely; they repel influences; they shun general society; they incline to shut themselves in their chamber in the house, to live in the country rather than in the town, and to find their tasks and amusements in solitude. Society, to be sure, does not like this very well; it saith, Whoso goes to walk alone, accuses the whole world; he declares all to be unfit to be his companions; it is very uncivil, nay, insulting; Society will retaliate.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature: Addresses and Lectures, Centenary Edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1903) pp. 340-342.

Emerson sees these persons as not naturally "melancholy, sour, and unsocial"; neither are they "stockish or brute."<sup>34</sup> If they reveal their thoughts, they show themselves ones who think love "the last and highest gift of nature."<sup>35</sup> They want love and friendship. Yet they demand too much of their fellowmen. "With this passion for what is great and extraordinary, it cannot be wondered at that they are repelled by vulgarity and frivolity in people. They say to themselves, It is better to be alone than in bad company."<sup>36</sup>

Also, Emerson finds that "their solitary and fastidious manners not only withdraw them from the conversation, but from the labors of the world; they are not good citizens, not good members of society."<sup>37</sup> He derides their unwillingness to accept responsibility for public welfare or the operation of government. Instead of acting to change the world for the better, these idealists stand aside. "What right, cries the good world, has the man of genius to retreat from work, and indulge himself? The popular literary creed seems to be, 'I am a sublime

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 343-344.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

genius; I ought not therefore to labor.'"<sup>38</sup>

In the Dial for July, 1843, was published another article that was probably Emerson's work, for the article is unsigned and Emerson was editor of the magazine at that time. Titled "Social Tendencies," the article says that society has a right to demand from men of literary genius that they be friends "of virtue, of liberty, of man, ever ready to announce and explain new truths." Instead of holding to these high aims, the best writers of the age are interested only in making money. It is the author's opinion that "few seek to become acquainted with the dignity of poverty, if complete fidelity to their mission should involve such a consequence." The author reaches the height of his condemnation by calling attention to the pitiable "bankruptcy of soul" in modern writers, and declares that "the degeneracy of literature taints the age."<sup>39</sup>

Who the persons were that Emerson had in mind when he wrote these articles is open to speculation but it is obvious that "The Transcendentalist" presents almost line by line in the portions cited and in much of the remainder of the article a characterization of Hawthorne--or Hawthorne as he appeared to his Transcendental acquaintances. At least, one can surmise that Hawthorne so appeared to these

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>39</sup>Rowfant edition, Vol. III, p. 78.

acquaintances on the basis of the biographical evidence available. Both articles are attacking writers. And both, for a man of his sensitive temperament and proud independence of spirit, must have been insupportably offensive to Hawthorne. For Emerson was greatly respected by many persons; his opinion carried weight. Yet while seeming to be Hawthorne's friend, Emerson was capable of writing a condemnation of just such a man as Hawthorne appeared to be.

The truth was, as the brief biographical sketch has previously shown, that Hawthorne had withdrawn himself from society to pursue his ambition. He was naturally reticent, as Bridge said, respecting the opinions of others and expecting a like respect for his. He had dedicated his life to the creation of good literature and had written with a devotion to truth that was almost a religion. As a reward for such high-minded fixity of purpose he had neither recognition nor money. His sufferings during his unswerving efforts to reach his goals had been intense, and his financial and social position was the more humiliating because some of his classmates at Bowdoin, such as Horatio Bridge, Franklin Pierce, and H. W. Longfellow, had become recognized as successful.

It therefore seems reasonable to surmise that Hawthorne, sensitive to criticism and subject to resentment, did not read Emerson's articles with detachment. Furthermore, from the evidence supplied by his biographers and despite



the self-distrust Bridge found characteristic of him, Hawthorne was not the sort of person whom others dared patronize. Yet Emerson concluded "The Transcendentalist" by patronizing in this fashion the writers whom he had condemned: "Society also has its duties in reference to this class, and must hold them with what charity it can. Possibly some benefit may yet accrue from them to the state."<sup>40</sup> If Hawthorne ever had reason for retaliating in his writings for real or fancied insults, he had it here.

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<sup>40</sup> Nature; Addresses and Lectures, p. 358.

### CHAPTER III

#### RETALIATION: HAWTHORNE VS. EMERSON

When Hawthorne's story "The Artist of the Beautiful"<sup>1</sup> was published in 1844, the intelligentsia of New England were in intellectual ferment. Not only was the Transcendentalist movement a force that won an influential following, but knowledge had been broadened and educational methods improved by men like George Ticknor and Edward Everett. From Germany, Spain, France, and Italy these two men had brought back literature and theories that were shockingly new to the exponents of traditional English learning and thinking. There were also those who, like Herman Melville, pleaded for encouragement of native artists so that America might develop its own unique culture, not a drab imitation of the English one. It was a time stirred by efforts to reform, by new invention and new industry, by the search for perpetual motion, by pressures for women's rights, by all the ideas of a new democracy becoming aware of the possibilities for individualistic thinking and action.

Consequently, mid-nineteenth century readers of "The Artist of the Beautiful" must have thought the story nothing

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<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Mosses from an Old Manse," The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Riverside Edition, Vol. II, pp. 504-536.

more than one of the bold new attacks on hide-bound traditionalists of Puritan persuasion, those who subscribed to quantitative progressivism and the gospel of hard work, so thoroughly taught by Benjamin Franklin as to be almost inherent in American thought. On the face of it, "The Artist of the Beautiful" seems to be propaganda for the cause of all artists and a condemnation of mundane, routine, commercially-minded existence. It even seems as if Hawthorne himself is the prototype of the artist and is agonizedly crying out against the lack of understanding and appreciation which baffles his artistic efforts.

Allegorically the story seems to show youth and age (symbolized by old Peter Hovenden and his daughter Annie) emerging for the darkness of earlier times (the evening dusk along the pathway) into the enlightenment provided by the work of an artist of the beautiful (the light shining across the pathway from the projecting windows of the artist's workshop). Scornful of such enlightenment, mankind chooses to accept only partial and flickering illumination (the light provided by the forge in Danforth's smithy) by getting only brief and rather lurid perceptions of the spiritual heights to which the human spirit can soar and fastening its thinking upon the practical (Danforth's work), the limited (the area of intermittent illumination provided by the forge), and the ugly (the clutter that surrounds the forge).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This allegorical reading is based on a consideration

Mankind's lack of appreciation for the artist's gifts cripples the efforts of the artist to produce that which would elevate the thinking of all men, and only through suffering does he gain inner strength to stand against his persecutors and do the work he was born to do. Having done so, he finds his work comes to nothing: mankind is unwilling to be enlightened, and the only hope the artist can have is to find personal satisfaction in artistic creation.

The story, so the author says, is a "representation of the troubled life of those who strive to create the beautiful . . . amid . . . thwarting influences" (p.522). Doubtless numerous mid-nineteenth century readers interpreted the story in that light, as do the majority of modern critics. And no doubt Hawthorne expected the majority of his readers to accept his statement as his sincere intent. It is not reasonable, however, to assume that Hawthorne expected--or wanted--this statement of the seemingly obvious to deceive readers who knew him personally.

No one who knew Hawthorne, the dignified and proud, could have thought him one with the cringing, pitiful, baffled artist, so fittingly named Warland, one within whom

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of Hawthorne's heritage of theological writing and his life-long admiration for Pilgrim's Progress. See Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, (Austin, 1957), pp. 34-35, for a variant interpretation. Male says that the story, "Though it was probably not intended as such, can be read as a parable of the Romantic transition."

raged a civil war.<sup>3</sup> This tension in him is apparent as he makes his anguished "pilgrim's progress" through varied troubles, alternately rebelling against society and conforming; seeking ways of solving his problems through flight, alcohol, love, and inertia; and settling down finally to completing his "spiritualization of matter." He shows no gratitude for the training he has received from Hovenden or for Danforth's help and kindness, but blames others for his unhappiness and failures. For example, to Hovenden he says: "You are my evil spirit, . . . you and the hard, coarse world! The leaden thoughts and the despondency that you fling upon me are my clogs, else, I should long ago have achieved the task that I was created for" (p.515).

Such a speech would have been impossible for Hawthorne himself to utter. It was not simply that such excuses would have been entirely out of character for Hawthorne, but that it was the type of melodramatic sentimentality that he never used seriously after Fanshawe. The speech and others of like nature are clues that the story has a satirical meaning.

From first to last the story can be read as mockery of Transcendentalism, particularly as set forth in Emerson's

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<sup>3</sup>This interpretation seems logical since the implication in the name is that the artist himself is the land of war. However, see Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, p. 34, for his opinion that the name suggests the artist's struggle "against the materialism" of the world.



Nature. As the tale opens, Peter Hovenden and his daughter are approaching the window of the artist's shop, inside which they see a variety of timepieces, "all with their faces turned from the streets, as if churlishly disinclined to inform wayfarers what o'clock it was" (p.504). The obvious allegorical implication is that the artist is wisely instructing passers-by to be less the slaves of time. From Warland's point of view such a method of display would have struck Hovenden as churlish disregard of the value of time. But it is the watches themselves that seem to be "churlishly disinclined" to tell the time. Are they not, therefore, symbols of the Dial, that purveyor of what Hawthorne considered unrealistic philosophy, that publication that would not face the facts?

It is possible that the relation between the faces of timepieces and the name of the Transcendental magazine was the controlling reason for Hawthorne's choice of a trade for the artist. However, if Hawthorne was satirizing the basic tenets of Emerson's Nature, he would have taken into consideration Emerson's statements that "the creation of beauty is Art"<sup>4</sup> and beauty is "a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping."<sup>5</sup> To incorporate all of these components in a work of art, Hawthorne's protagonist

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<sup>4</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature; Addresses and Lectures, Centenary edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1903), p. 23. [Nature originally published in 1836.]

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

had need of just such knowledge as a watchmaker has, mechanical knowledge that a silversmith, a potter, a painter, or a sculptor does not necessarily have.

It is also possible that Hawthorne's choice of the artist's masterpiece was determined by Emerson's ideas. For Emerson says that "a work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature."<sup>6</sup> Also, to Emerson "almost all the individual forms of nature are agreeable to the eye, as is proved by our endless imitations of some of them as the acorn, the grape, the pine-cone, the wheat-ears, the egg, the wings and forms of most birds, the lion's claw, the serpent, the butterfly, sea-shells, flames, clouds, buds, leaves, and the forms of many trees, as the palm."<sup>7</sup> From this list Hawthorne may have selected the butterfly as suiting his needs, both for purposes of symbolism and for developing the plot of the story.

To the artist who was to imitate this form of nature, Hawthorne gave characteristics that precisely fit Emerson's description of the true nature lover: he is one "who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Emerson, Nature, p. 9.

Also Warland is such a person as might be visualized from Emerson's analysis of "the wisest man": "Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood."<sup>9</sup> In childhood Warland "sometimes produced pretty shapes in wood, principally figures of flowers and birds, and sometimes seemed to aim at the hidden mysteries of mechanism. But it was always for the purposes of grace, and never with any mockery of the useful. He did not, like the crowd of school-boy artisans, construct little windmills on the angle of a barn or water mills across the neighboring brook" (p. 507).

Warland's flights to the woods to seek peace or revitalization suggest another of Emerson's beliefs: "In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth."<sup>10</sup> Hawthorne's artist "wasted the sunshine, as people said, in wandering through the woods and fields and along the banks of streams. There, like a child, he found amusement in chasing butterflies or watching the motions of water insects" (p. 515).

In both appearance<sup>11</sup> and disposition Warland is always a child. Hawthorne contrived numerous incidents that

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>See Richard Harter Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction:

reveal the artist's immaturity--the selfishness and undisciplined rebellion and cruelty common to most children during various phases of their development. One incident in particular, involving the girl with whom he fancies himself in love, discloses the depth of Warland's self-centeredness: Annie touches the mechanism upon which the artist had long labored. She gave it "the slightest possible touch, with the point of a needle." As she did so, "the artist seized her by the wrist with a force that made her scream aloud. She was affrighted at the convulsion of intense rage and anguish that writhed across his features " (p. 518).

Since Emerson considered the universe composed of "Nature and the Soul,"<sup>12</sup> it is fitting that the artist should ignore all else in his efforts to uncover the mysteries of those two components. He spends hours in the woods worshiping and intently studying nature. The other hours he spends in his shop trying to create a butterfly, that symbol of the psyche, or soul. The bitter irony that underlies the tale, however, is the deep unhappiness of this Transcendentalist who is supposed to draw wisdom from nature. For though Hawthorne's dramatizations of Emerson's

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The Light and The Dark (Norman, 1952, 1964), p. 87, for a differing opinion of the purpose of Warland's size. Fogle says: "Undoubtedly the repeated emphasis upon Warland's physical smallness and weakness are [sic.] meant to underline the opposition of ideal-material."

<sup>12</sup>Emerson, Nature, p. 4.

ideas are too numerous to exhaust here analytically, nothing that Hawthorne satirizes makes Emerson's philosophy more absurd than a comparison of Warland's life with these thoughts from Nature: "Under the general name of commodity, I rank all those advantages which our senses owe to nature. This, of course, is a benefit which is temporary and mediate, not ultimate, like its service to the soul. Yet although low, it is perfect in its kind, and is the only use of nature which all men apprehend. The misery of man appears like childish petulance [Warland is "full of little petulances" (p. 510)], when we explore the steady and prodigal provision that has been made for his support and delight on this green ball which floats him through the heavens."<sup>13</sup>

To Hawthorne, whose awareness of his own and the world's misery was acute, such optimism would have seemed not only absurd but callously indifferent to the facts of man's lot. On a par with such a view would have been Emerson's cheerful opinion of the uses of debt: "Debt, grinding debt, whose iron face the widow, the orphan, and the sons of genius fear and hate;--debt, which consumes so much time, which so cripples and disheartens a great spirit with cares that seem so base, is a preceptor whose lessons cannot be foregone, and is needed most by those who suffer if most."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 12

<sup>14</sup>Emerson, Nature, p. 37



Misery and debt were familiar to Hawthorne. Surely, then, he must have read with indignation these words of Emerson's from Nature: "You think me the child of my circumstances; I make my circumstances."<sup>15</sup> For Hawthorne had tried with all the concentration and planning of which he was capable to succeed in his profession, but misfortune had been the principal result. Therefore, he could not have felt otherwise than contemptuous of such ideas of Emerson's as, "You call it the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me. Am I in harmony with myself? My position will seem to you just and commanding. Am I vicious and insane? My fortunes will seem to you obscure and descending."<sup>16</sup>

So the artist, whose force is "altogether spiritual," whose brain is not "mystified with matter," whose creative spirit is darkened and confused by the "hard, brute force" of Robert Danforth (p.510), makes his way through a series of moods that change his circumstances. First he diligently seeks to turn his idea into reality. Then, when Annie destroys the mechanism, he works at his trade for awhile and wins the respect and gratitude of the townspeople. He is completely miserable, however, while dutifully fulfilling his obligations as a tradesman. After this experience of appearing "just and commanding" while anything but in

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<sup>15</sup>Emerson, "The Transcendentalist", Nature, Addresses and Lectures, p. 334.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

harmony with himself, he inherits a small sum of money, loses all interest in work of any kind (no doubt he had not learned the lessons provided by debt), and becomes a drunkard.

From this emptiness he is saved by a symbolic butterfly who comes like a summoning spirit (the divine in nature, of course) and recalls him to his great destiny. He again devotes himself to the task of spiritualizing matter. At the news of Annie's engagement he falls ill. After recovering, he gains weight, looks like a child one might wish to pat on the head, and acts as if "the spirit had gone out of him" (p.524).

Here Warland's condition is treated by Hawthorne in a manner that is certainly burlesque: "Poor, poor and fallen Owen Warland! These are the symptoms that he had ceased to be an inhabitant of the better sphere that lies unseen around us. He had lost his faith in the invisible, and now prided himself, as such unfortunates do, in the wisdom which rejected much that even his eye could see, and trusted confidently in nothing but what his hand could touch" (p.525).

There is no doubt that in this, as elsewhere in the tale, Hawthorne is mockingly presenting Locke's philosophy as the dreadful opponent of Transcendentalism. In fact, Peter Hovenden, the materialistic man who relies on common sense, might well represent Locke, since it is Hovenden's cold skepticism that Warland fears more than any opinions

of the other townspeople. And according to Charles Feidelson, Jr., the Transcendentalists were so intense in their rejection of Locke that "their obsession with the evils of empiricism became a popular joke. They pictured mankind as prisoners of an outworn creed and spoke with 'distrust and dread' of Locke's iron hand."<sup>17</sup> If these images were familiar to the readers of Hawthorne's time, they might have drawn humorous inferences from the Transcendental artist's revulsion at the sight of a steam engine--from his horror when confronted by the "iron laborer" (p.507).

However, Owen Warland wrenched himself loose from the deadening Lockian obsession and once again took up his life's work. As Hawthorne ambiguously puts it: "It was his fortune, good or ill, to achieve the purpose of his life" (p.527). Hawthorne does not elaborate this statement, but it is apparently related to an earlier hint of Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude toward life. Unlike the Transcendentalists, he saw life as necessarily composed of good and evil. The concept is clearly implied in the description of the blacksmith in his shop: "Moving about in this red glare and alternate dusk was the figure of the blacksmith, well worthy to be viewed in so picturesque an aspect of light and shade, where the bright blaze struggled

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<sup>17</sup>Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), p. 112.

with the black night as if each would have snatched his comely strength from the other" (p.505). The innocent-seeming adjective "comely" and the pronominal "his," with its proper grammatical antecedent, could be easily overlooked by the casual reader, leaving him with nothing more than a picture of flickering firelight. But what Hawthorne is clearly saying in his allegory is that there is good in both light and darkness, those symbols of good and evil, knowledge and ignorance.

Whatever good came to Warland through the accomplishment of his ambition is not recognized by his fellow townsmen. When he presents his creation to Annie as a belated wedding gift, she marvels at the butterfly but cannot conceal from Warland her scorn for so flimsy and useless a product of his life's work. When Annie and Robert's baby crushes the butterfly to fragments, Owen Warland stands bereft of visible results of his work and of all human understanding and affection. He has only the cold comfort of having transformed an idea into reality--the result of his lifetime devotion to Transcendental philosophy.

Thus in his droll manner, Hawthorne, has made a travesty of these words of Emerson's: "the beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind and not for barren contemplation but for new creation. . . . A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result of expression of nature, in miniature. . . . The poet, the painter, the

sculptor . . . seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce."<sup>18</sup>

The artist's "miniature" expression of nature is a butterfly that sheds its "radiance" in the presence of Annie, Danforth, Hovenden, and the baby. While it rests on the hands of those kindly uncritical two, Annie and Danforth, its Transcendental radiance glows. On the hand of Hovenden, it begins to lose its radiance and its life beneath Hovenden's Lockian observation. It is just a baby, however, who finally destroys the butterfly, the fragile product of Transcendental thought.

The final irony of the story is the artist's refusal to allow the butterfly to return and rest upon his creator. He says to it grandly: "Thou has gone forth out of thy master's heart. There is no return for thee" (p.535). Thus the Transcendental God-in-man speaks, and in Biblical rhetoric. One wonders if here Hawthorne is not bitterly satirizing what he possibly considered the blithe, insensate optimism of Transcendental refusal to recognize the misery of man's predicament. For man, considered by Christians to be the incarnated thought of God, is cast unprotected, like the butterfly, into a world where he faces lack of understanding and imminent

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<sup>18</sup>Emerson, Nature, p. 24.



destruction. Such an interpretation would bear out Hawthorne's opinion of life as a grim affair, as he says in his notebooks: "God himself cannot compensate us for being born, in any period short of eternity. All the misery we endure here constitutes a claim for another life; --and, still more, all that happens, because all true happiness involves something more than a mortal capacity for the enjoyment of it."<sup>19</sup>

Whatever he intended, Hawthorne did not mean "The Artist of the Beautiful" to be only a simple parable of the world's callous treatment of the man of genius. For the story confirms the widely-held critical opinion that Hawthorne not only respected plain people who were morally upright and concerned for the welfare of others, but he condemned the intellectually proud who separated themselves from mankind. As Newton Arvin expresses Hawthorne's conviction: "To err is to cut oneself off from 'the whole sympathetic chain of human nature'; to suffer is to be merely on one's own."<sup>20</sup> Warland suffered, consequently, not because humanity would not approve him but because he would not approve humanity.

In "The Great Carbuncle," "The Ambitious Guest,"

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<sup>19</sup>The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, ed. Newton Arvin (New York, 1929), p. 180.

<sup>20</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Short Stories, ed. Newton Arvin (New York, 1959), p. xvii.

"The Great Stone Face," and other stories Hawthorne's portrayals of simple, unpretentious persons are sympathetically done. In "The Artist of the Beautiful" persons of their type are cast in an unfavorable light--but only because Hawthorne chose, for purposes of satire, to use the deceptive view point and portray them as seen through the eyes of Warland. When their characteristics are analyzed without the coloring of Warland's opinion, they appear admirable.

Peter Hovenden is a responsible family man and a conscientious worker. Also, he is kind. He has accepted Warland as an apprentice, borne with his idiosyncrasies, and taught him the delicate skill of watchmaking. He is concerned enough over Warland's success to come in to praise him when the artist has done good work on the timekeepers of the town. He comes personally to invite Warland to the engagement party for Annie and Robert Danforth and urges him to come, because Hovenden still feels that Warland is part of the Hovenden family. In other words, despite his disapproval of the artist's waywardness, he does not withdraw his friendship.

Annie is a person of courtesy and sensitive awareness. Her good will is obvious in her willingness to grant that Warland may have genius. In gently reprimanding her father for voicing his opinions of Warland and Danforth too loudly, she shows her respect for the feelings of others. And when after many years of being completely ignored by

Warland, she welcomes him to her home, she does so with genuine warmth and pleasure. She is, in fact, as much a lady as Hawthorne could picture.

In Robert Danforth, Hawthorne draws another admirable character. Danforth is a skilled blacksmith, capable of making not only the heavy equipment needed by men who support life but the tiny anvil required by Warland for his artistic endeavors (p.510). In addition, he is self-confident, cheerful, and kind. When he brings Warland the anvil, his efforts at friendly banter are met with ill-tempered rebuff. He is not offended, however, and his good-natured laughter rings out in response to Warland's expression of contempt for practical work. He is sensitive enough to be aware that he is interfering with Warland's occupation and leaves with a hearty wish for the artist's success and the offer of his assistance if Warland at any time has need of it (p.511).

Too, he is not stupid, despite Warland's opinion of him as the epitome of ugly brute force. For when he overhears Peter Hovenden's remarks about preferring the work of a blacksmith to that of a watchmaker, he shows he is aware of undemocratic bias in American thinking when he lightly asks Annie: "And what says Miss Annie to that doctrine? She, I suppose, will think it a genteeler business to tinker up a lady's watch than to forge a horseshoe or make a gridiron" (p.506).

However, there is no snobbery in Robert Danforth,

but a level-headed acceptance of whatever social position his chosen work allots him. In fact, this man whose pleasant voice fills Warland's shop with a sound like that of a "bass viol" (p. 510), whose cheerful competence and healthy acceptance of himself and his fellowman win the reader's respect, also rightly enough wins Annie's love. Their marriage is a happy one, for in the last scene of the story the reader cannot miss the atmosphere of love and respect that pervades the Danforth home.

To one who knows something of Hawthorne's life, this outcome is logical. Hawthorne's grandfather Richard Manning was a respected citizen of the town of Salem. He had intellectual interests that led him to collect books, from which Hawthorne learned to read and to appreciate good literature. The boy loved his grandfather and thought of him respectfully as a kind of Samuel Johnson.<sup>21</sup> This kindly man was a blacksmith. Naturally, then, Hawthorne treats Danforth sympathetically. Only Warland's words create in the mind of the readers the impression that Danforth is an unpleasant character.

In fact, of the four adult characters, only the supposed hero is the kind of person critics believe Hawthorne condemned. For the artist is a man possessed by an idea. He isolates himself to create something that brings no real

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<sup>21</sup>Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years (New York, 1948), p. 30.

good to himself or his fellowmen. He rejects love, marriage, and the affections of all mankind, despite the fact that he has the opportunity to gain the love of a fine woman, and the gratitude of his fellow townsmen through his skill as watchmaker. Futility is the only result of his pride in his superior insight and abilities, and his obsessive love of the beautiful.<sup>22</sup>

It is evident from the following passage in which Hawthorne analyzes the pleasure he found in gardening that he did not wish to be regarded as one who loved "the beautiful" to the exclusion of all else: "But not merely the squeamish love of the beautiful was gratified by my toil in the kitchen garden. . . . Gazing at the vegetables, I felt that by my agency, something worth living for had been done. A new substance was born in the world. They were real and tangible existences, which the mind could seize hold of and rejoice in."<sup>23</sup> Here, also, is his affirmation that a man's objectives must provide him with a reason for living and those objectives must deal with the realities of existence. And here is further insight into the philosophy of the man who saw Emerson as ever

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<sup>22</sup>In The House of Seven Gables Clifford was also obsessed by "his love of the beautiful" and was a moral and intellectual weakling. See pp. 328-329, The Complete Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson (New York, 1937).

<sup>23</sup>"The Old Manse," Mosses, p. 24.



reaching "out of cloudland in vain search for something real."

Hawthorne was also the man who frequently saw life from an ironical point of view and used satire to express his skepticism, as a review of his life and writings reveals. Such a review also shows that he was a proud, sensitive, and paradoxical man, subject to resentments that he occasionally indulged by sarcastic reprisals against those who offended him. It is also plain that his philosophy was opposed to that of his Transcendental acquaintances, and he satirized their ideas in a number of stories.

Taking all these facts into consideration, it seems logical that Hawthorne may have accepted as a personal affront two articles of Emerson's published in the Dial of 1843, both of which deprecated American writers whose observable personal characteristics closely approximated Hawthorne's own. It would therefore have been in character for Hawthorne to have retaliated in writing for the implied insults.

Furthermore, the imagery and vocabulary of "The Artist of the Beautiful" are so similar to those of Emerson's Nature that the similarity seems more than coincidental. Too, the facts that "The Artist of the Beautiful" was published in 1844, closely following the appearance of Emerson's articles in the Dial and that the story was of the same period during which Hawthorne wrote other stories satirically attacking Transcendentalism lend further support

to the conjecture that the story is satirical. However, the most acceptable proof that the story is a satire derives from the fact that when interpreted literally it negates Hawthorne's philosophy as it had appeared repeatedly in other stories and was propounded in later writings. Taken together, all these considerations provide evidence that "The Artist of the Beautiful" was one of the bitterest and most complicated of Hawthorne's satires, a vehicle of retaliation against his Transcendental acquaintances, particularly Emerson.



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Typed by Mrs. Helen Groce  
Phone 288-4353